

# New Hope Lutheran Church

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*April 18, 2021*  
*3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter*

## Coming Events

**All services have been cancelled.**

Apr 20 6:30pm Zoom Raamatupiiri  
Apr 23 7:00pm Confirmation **Zoom**  
Apr 27 7:30pm Worship & Music **Zoom**

**In our prayers** Fred, Esme, Martha.

## Prayer of the Day

Holy and righteous God, you are the author of life, and you adopt us to be your children. Fill us with your words of life, that we may live as witnesses to the resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn – Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds -  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvrj1BisIZw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvrj1BisIZw)

## Psalm 4

**1** Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer.  
**2** How long will you people turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods  
**3** Know that the LORD has set apart his faithful servant for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him.  
**4** Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.  
**5** Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the LORD.  
**6** Many, LORD, are asking, “Who will bring us prosperity?” Let the light of your face shine on us.  
**7** Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound.  
**8** In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.

## First Reading “Acts 3:12 – 19”

**12** When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? **13** The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. **14** You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. **15** You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. **16** By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see. **17** “Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. **18** But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. **19** Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

## Second Reading “1 John 3:1 – 7”

**1** See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. **2** Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. **3** All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is

pure. **4** Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. **5** But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. **6** No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. **7** Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

## Gospel “Luke 24:36b – 48”

**36** While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” **37** They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. **38** He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? **39** Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” **40** When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. **41** And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” **42** They gave him a piece of broiled fish, **43** and he took it and ate it in their presence. **44** He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” **45** Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. **46** He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, **47** and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. **48** You are witnesses of these things.

## Sermon

*“Witnesses”*

I want to begin with the story of Chippie the parakeet – who never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage singing joyfully, the next he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over.

His problem began when his owner decided to clean his cage with a vacuum cleaner. She stuck the nozzle in to suck up the seeds and feathers in the bottom of the cage. Then the phone rang. Instinctively she turned to pick it up. She barely said hello when –sswwwwppppp! Chippie got sucked in. His owner gasped, let the phone drop, and snapped off the vacuum cleaner. With her heart in her mouth, she unzipped the bag.

There was Chippie – alive but stunned – covered with heavy black dust. She grabbed him and rushed to the bathtub, turned

on the faucet full blast, and held Chippie under a torrent of ice-cold water, power-washing him clean. She then did what any compassionate pet owner would do: she snatched up the hair dryer and blasted the wet, shivering little bird with hot air....

Chippie doesn't sing much any more.

The point here is that past experiences have a way of coloring the future, don't they? Our own past experience often has an effect on the decisions and choices we make today. So if some event would have turned out differently in our past, our choices today might be totally different. While we are most affected by our upbringing, it doesn't stop there. Our future decisions could still be affected by events that happen to us today, which is why we find people who went through the Great Depression were usually rather thrifty. They knew how to make do on very little; and very often they did just that for the rest of their lives. Their past affected their future.

In the same way, people who have grown up and lived on the rather rosy end of the financial spectrum usually have fewer qualms about spending their money. Purchasing higher end goods is a way of life. The frugal are always quite shocked at how much is spent on goods and accessories, just as those who spend profusely are shocked by how little the frugal live on; some claiming it isn't even possible to live on so little. In both cases their past affects their current choices.

This of course, goes beyond purchasing patterns. Some people have had a bad experience at church and never return even though they may have happily attended for years. My father hated turnips his entire adult life because that was all he was fed as a teenager in a prisoner of war camp. Many people avoid certain situations or even certain products because of a bad experience. And fear (anywhere between mild or strong) is at the heart of this avoidance.

Unfortunately that fear from past experience (however great or small it might be), can cause us to miss out on some pretty good things in life. Some people will never swim in a body of water larger than a swimming pool for example. They may have had an incident where something unpleasant happened in a lake; to themselves, or somebody they knew. They may have read something that led them to believe lakes are unclean or dangerous. For whatever reason, they miss out on the freedom of being able to swim more than sixty meters in one direction. Their past hinders them from enjoying a wonderful experience.

And this is the kind of scene we find the disciples in our gospel today. All their lives they have dealt with the mindset of the Jewish authorities and the Roman military. They know how narrow-minded the powerful Scribes and Pharisees can be. They are well aware of how brutal things can get for those who cross the authorities. Even if they haven't had a direct experience, well... they saw what had happened to Jesus. And so they allowed their past experience to decide for them how they should react to the death of their leader. They went and hid themselves away.

They also let their past experience decide how they should react to the appearance of a risen Jesus. In the account we heard today from Luke, Jesus sudden appearance terrifies them. They think they are seeing a ghost; a disembodied spirit that had come to haunt them. We don't know why. Maybe they heard a few too many ghost stories growing up. At any rate, Jesus makes a few attempts to calm them down. He invites them to touch his skin, to see that it is real and that their hands won't go right through. He eats a piece of fish, proving to them that his body is able to consume nourishment. The food isn't seen floating around in the area where his stomach should be.

Jesus also questions their judgement, their choice to be afraid. He asks them why they are afraid and have doubts. It seems perfectly natural to Jesus that his appearance alone is enough to squash all their past experiences and the choices they would make based on them. They are, after all, witnesses of his resurrection. They have seen the results first hand. Why do they still act out of their fear based on past experience? Why do they still have doubts about this whole event? Don't they want to know the joy of being with the risen Christ?

In many ways, I suspect we can side with the disciples. How often are our choices fueled by our past experience rather than what Jesus would have us choose? How often are we afraid to step into unknown territory because the last time we did that, it wasn't a pleasant experience, and we would rather just avoid it? This is where the disciples were at; the presence of Jesus alone wasn't really quite enough to push away their doubts.

That can be our feeling too when we express some of the following thoughts:

- Yes, Jesus loves me, but should I really consider tithing?

- I believe in God, but is regular worship really necessary?
- I know about resurrection, but do I have to be reminded that someday I am going to die?
- Children should get some Christian education and activities at camp, but does a place like Hannah Lake Bible Center really need my support?

How often do we like to have faith at an intellectual level, but we just can't seem to push ourselves to do something in a physical way? We can handle looking at the risen Jesus, but don't ask me to touch his wounds. They are probably full of infection – and past experience has taught us to avoid that.

So how did Jesus get the disciples over the final hurdle? How did he get them to put the stranglehold fear of past experience aside, to look beyond it, and to embrace the joyful idea of resurrection? We know he did, since we heard in our first lesson from Acts that Peter had come out of hiding, was in the temple, the most public of places, and telling a crowd about Jesus being the promised messiah. The fear from past experience was gone. How did Jesus melt it out of them?

As far as I can tell from our gospel, the answer lies in verse 45 where it says; "*Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.*" In other words, Jesus pointed out that part of their past experience, the reading of scriptures, was key to releasing them from the fears they had. In the Bible are found answers to our most pressing questions. Answers on how to handle our fears. Don't trust totally on past experience, trust in God as well. That's a major theme in the Bible as told in the stories of everyone from Abraham to Zechariah. The scriptures are full of examples of people who put their fears of past experiences behind them so that they could more fully serve God.

And, as we saw in our first lesson, this results in witnesses who aren't afraid to witness. In spite of some horrific past events in their lives, the followers of Jesus not only came out of hiding, they became influential promoters of Jesus, having a huge influence on the growth of the early church. And they were able to do this because they weren't afraid to publicly tell their faith story, and what it meant to them in their lives. That's what we too, as followers of Christ, are called to do. So let's get rid of our fears due to past experiences, let's follow the example of

the hero's of faith, and discover the full joys of the Christian life, as well as spreading it to others.

And, who knows, with the right kind of witness, maybe even Chippie will sing again. Amen.

Hymn – Lord You Give the Great Commission  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmjFLViW4P8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmjFLViW4P8)

### Prayers

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

Living God, in the midst of Easter joy we are still filled with questions and wondering. Open our hearts and minds as we encounter the scriptures, so that the church embodies repentance and forgiveness in the name of Jesus to all nations. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Creating God, like a master artist you have fashioned the universe out of your love and delight. Heal your creation where it is in need of restoration. Provide all the inhabitants of earth a peaceful and sustainable home. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of all, the nations hunger and thirst for your righteousness. Many call on you for guidance and strength. Answer their hopes with the peace of Christ and give your lovingkindness to national, provincial, and local leaders of people. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Healing God, you hear the cries of those in need and answer them in their distress. Grant to those who are sick and suffering your compassion and nurse them back to health and wholeness. Be close to the hearts of the lonely. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Loving Parent, you have given us such love that we should be called the children of God. Reveal yourself to us so that we in this community of faith will become more and more like you in our mutual love and bold witness. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of all times and ages, those who have died in you now see you as you are. We thank you for their lives among us. Assure us of the peace you have promised, that we may join them in everlasting life. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In the hope of new life in Christ, O Lord, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn – This Joyful Eastertide -  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=9r9JK1sPB4A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9r9JK1sPB4A)